

A

LETTER
TO THE
RIGHT HONOURABLE
WILLIAM PITT,
UPON THE NATURE OF
Parliamentary Representation;
ITS USE AND ABUSE.
WITH AN
APPENDIX,

Containing a SHORT SKETCH of a REFORM
IN THE
MODE OF ELECTION,

LONDON;
Printed for J. STOCKDALE, opposite Burlington-
House, PICCADILLY.

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Concise & Short Statement of a Return

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1857. B I C C U R E R Y

BRITISH MUSEUM

and good example of your Country to the world.



JANUARY 28, 1784.

SIR,

UNDER the firm persuasion of your
manly and steady adherence to
the patriotic and generous prin-
ciples, on which you have undertaken,
at so critical a conjuncture, the arduous
task of conducting the affairs of this
country; and under the most ardent
hope, that a wise and enlightened nation
will spurn, and resent the unconstitu-
tional and malicious attempts to force so
able and upright a Minister from the ser-
vice of his King and his country, I take the

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liberty of addressing to *you* some thoughts which have lately occurred to me upon the subject of Parliamentary Reformation.

The people look towards you for the establishment of a more just and adequate representation, and you have given them reason to believe, that you inherit the sentiments of your great father upon that important subject.

I will freely confess, that I view this matter in a very different light from that, in which it is generally seen; and I will take the advantage, by being anonymous, of delivering my sentiments with perfect freedom, in the order they occur, and in the unstudied language, in which they present themselves.

Nothing argues the necessity of a reform in Parliament more strongly than the

the present disposition of the House of Commons; and the strides it appears inclined to make towards encroachments upon the evident privileges and prerogatives of both the other branches of government. Some late resolutions of that House, which militate directly against the known constitutional rights of the Crown; and that paltry and spiteful trick of shutting up the Treasury, more becoming the conduct of malicious and disappointed school-boys, than of competitors for high offices in the state, prove the above assertion. Measures of this complexion are unmanly, and uncandid to the last degree; and whilst they exhibit an exact representation of the shuffling minds which conceive them, they produce a striking contrast between you, Sir, and these jockies, whose own consciences must tell them, how utterly in-

capable you would be of the same disgraceful *Manœuvres*. They are calculated, however, to open the eyes of the nation, which, alone, if submitted to, they must ultimately distress, and to that tribunal we will leave their authors.

It should seem from these reflections, and the present temper of the Commons; that a reform is more wanting *in* the House, than *out* of it; in the *Elected*, than in the *Electors*. And as it is immediately from the first of these, that every benefit, as well as every evil of representation must result, it must be of infinitely more consequence, *who* are chosen, than *by whom* they are chosen.

If this be as incontestible, as it appears to be, and if a salutary and effectual reform be in meditation, will it not be the part

part of true wisdom, to specify and ascertain the particular objects of the people's choice, as well as the mode of exercising that right? Be this right ever so fairly settled; be this great privilege of the voters ever so adequately adjusted, still the sole end of the institution will fail, if fit subjects are wanting for the exercise of them. Should the constituent body be ever so capable, or inclined to fill their House with a worthy set of representatives, as matters now stand, this desirable event can not depend upon them. They can force nobody into their service, and are often obliged to return those, whom, in their consciences, they disapprove. Can they, in such a case, be said to be represented? and can their privilege, under such circumstances, be really regarded as so important and valuable? So far the contrary, that a right, so circumscribed and

and fettered, may become a serious disadvantage, and the possessors may have the strongest reason to lament the possession of it. By the laws they are constrained to be represented, and in the only fair sense of the term, they have no representatives. A little calm investigation of the real state of parliamentary representation would prove the insufficiency of it; and the same investigation, applied to the arguments hitherto used for its regulation and improvement, would as plainly evince their futility.

Many scientific calculations have been made of the number of voters, in proportion to the number of the people; of the few who have been represented by the many, and of the many by the few; of the right which has been lost, or which never existed in many populous places,

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and retained where there are very few, if any, inhabitants.—Such calculations have appeared without end, and it is extraordinary to consider, to how little purpose such labors and talents have been exerted.

If these reformers could, by their strenuous endeavors, procure a new race of men, from which to chuse their representatives, with better inclinations, and fewer passions, with more virtue, and fewer dangerous vices ; then, indeed, would their patriotic cares deserve the thanks of the public. As long as the stuff remains the same, of which candidates for parliamentary honors are made, so long must the choice remain pretty indifferent ; and though it must not be insinuated, that there is not a great variety in the dispositions and capacities of this

rank

rank of men; yet it will be found, that much the same proportion of the worthy and unworthy will be returned to parliament, during the prevalence of good or bad qualities, existing in the nation at any given period.

It is evident, that when the **GREAT** are depraved, the people will be so likewise; that a spirit of corruption gone forth will equally infect the *Electors* and the *Elected*; and that a vicious set of voters will never make it a point to chuse a virtuous set of delegates.—Upon a supposition, therefore, that vice and depravity prevail in our days, can it be desirable to extend the temptation to corruption, by extending the right of election?

A warm advocate for the rights of the people would be apt to lose his patience upon

upon reading this sentiment, thus hazarded; but before it is intirely condemned, it would be but just to attend to what may farther be advanced upon this delicate article. Your correspondent is as sincere a friend to the people, and their privileges, as the most enthusiastic member of the *Constitutional Society*, but will never testify that friendship by consenting to indulgences, which are neither constitutional, nor wholesome. He is firmly of opinion, that a mode of exercising the privilege of suffrage may be laid down, which would secure this privilege, to the utmost extenfion, free from the fatal effects which too evidently attend it, even under its present restrictions; and he will take the liberty of suggesting some thoughts upon it for your consideration before he concludes this letter.

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But before he enters upon this, it will be necessary to take a fair and impartial view of the nature and effects of parliamentary representation, as it now stands, both with respect to the *delegate*, and the *constituent*; and as, indeed, it must continue to stand under every mode of reform, which has hitherto been offered to public consideration.—It has been said, that the importance of the charge lies upon the first of these; and as long as the right of being a candidate is so open and general, it is hard to discover what advantages would accrue to the nation, by effecting any change whatever in the mode of electing these delegates, which would not effectually exclude men of a certain description.

It cannot be justly advanced, that the absolute possession of landed property to a certain

a certain amount, should be the sole requisite qualification in a candidate, since the very best may be found amongst the younger sons and brothers of noble or opulent families. These, though without positive possessions, are connected with the soil and its Lords in various ways, and by various ties of interest : but by what claim can an indigent Irishman, or any other stroller, without family or fortune, pretend to be the sponsor, or the protector, of the rights and properties of Englishmen ? The curses brought upon this country, by this vague and senseless species of delegation, have been innumerable : they cry much louder for reformation than the disproportioned rights of the constituent body, which are so uncertain in their operation, so little at the real disposal of the possessors themselves, so often liable to be ill exercised, and al-

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ways so far removed from the efficient scene of action.

I confess, Sir, a particular partiality to that mode of reasoning in matters of this nature, which comes home to mankind, as they are, and which results from practice and experience. All theoretic writers upon government, from Plato to Mr. Locke, and from him to Dr. Price, have been found extremely defective, wherever their maxims have been attempted to be reduced to practice. In the thirteen revolted provinces, where, the last of these authors tells us that liberty, in all her charms, has chosen her retreat, and where the perfection of Democracy may be supposed to reside, his precepts appear not to have produced their desired effect, nor have the Doctor's pupils found it practicable to adopt the maxims of their kind

instructor, upon every occasion, to the extent of his wishes. Let us, therefore, quit our closets, and mix immediately with the people in the exercise of those rights, which have been represented with so much pomp of language, as * “ divine, unalienable, and indefeasible, without the possession of which they must be the most abject slaves.”

It has been already said, that the present discontents upon the subject of representation, are founded upon the disproportion between the *Electors* and the *Elected*; the numbers who are unrepresented, and the few who have more than their share of that divine blessing. Some of the advocates of reformation wish, with apparent justice, to render representation more adequate; and others are so jealous

* See Dr. Price's Observations, &c. *passim*.

jealous of the rights of the people, as to contend, that almost every male of the age of twenty-one should be an elector.

Beside the consideration of *right*, the great political argument *in favour* of this extension, is the difficulty of engaging such members by corrupt means ; and the arguments *against* it are the confusion, the dissipation, the loss of time, and the general tumult which such popular assemblies must necessarily occasion. Without stopping to consider the evils resulting from hence, even in septennial elections, and the increase of those evils by rendering them more frequent, we will confine our reasoning against these numerous assemblies, to the convenience, or inconvenience, of corrupting them, since they are allowed to be corruptible, and consequently mischievous.

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To set this matter in a clearer light, we will consider it in a small circle, since it is equally applicable to the whole island. We will chuse for this purpose some large and populous city, and we will fix the right of election in the Mayor and Aldermen thereof, or, in a very few of the inhabitants. We will humbly take the liberty of supposing, for the purpose of argument only, that their worships are not totally free from the fashionable *influenza*; and, in this case, the rich candidate will find little difference in the weight of his bags, when he leaves the town, whether this right be in the *few*, or the *many*.

If every corruptible man has his price, that price must be in proportion to the man, and the sum necessary to bias the delicate conscience of a substantial Alderman, would effectually secure a hundred
To
needy

needy pot-boilers. The extension, therefore, of the right, would serve only to extend the vice; and when the riot and tumult of a very popular canvass are taken into the account, no friend to good order and virtue would wish to change the mode of election in such a city, or to offer every man in it a temptation to emulate the depravity of his betters, who would otherwise remain peaceably at home, working honestly for himself and his family, perfectly satisfied that he was represented.

If these arguments are valid in a city, they will be equally so in a county, or a less populous borough; and when the true nature of the duty and functions of a member of parliament are considered, it will be absurd to say, that Old Sarum may not contribute to the general welfare

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as effectually, as the whole county of York, even supposing every man in it to be an elector.

It has already been said, that the best of possible electors can only chuse the best of possible candidates, and gentlemen of this order will not be the better, or the worse qualified for the great national trust reposed in them, in proportion to the numbers that elect them: and as I hope it will be remembered, that it is neither my wish nor intention to insinuate, that any of the people should lose this privilege, I will not hesitate to submit my free and candid sentiments upon this great subject, to the better opinion of the wise and unprejudiced.

This leads us into a nicer investigation of the nature and use of representation,

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upon which important article much more occurs than can be compressed within the space of a letter.

The zealous advocates for the rights of the people seem to express an opinion, that every individual is intitled to be represented, and to have his will conveyed to the Senate by his delegate. If their arguments do not mean this, they mean nothing; and if they do, they contain what is very open to refutation.—If the opinions of all the electors in Great-Britain, even in their present pretended inadequate proportion, could by any magick be let loose in the House of Commons, what confusion would not ensue? and what end could be answered, either by the deliberations, or the conclusions of such an assembly? What confisstance of conduct could be expected in the members of it,

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when it would become their duty to enforce, perhaps, as many opinions upon the same question, as they might have of constituents? Such doctrines, when reduced to practice, must destroy themselves, and make way for more rational, and more salutary notions concerning the real import of representation.

The prevailing idea, that all constituents have a right to instruct their delegates, and consequently that these are under the obligation of submitting their own opinions to those of their electors, need only to be fairly considered, to appear deficient, impracticable, and unjust.

It may be supposed, when the rank, property, and education of candidates for parliament are considered, that they may generally be esteemed as wise and able,

at least, as the generality of their constituents ; and it would not be too much to add, that they may be expected to be even superior to the great majority of them. Would it not be thought hard, that any one of these, who may reasonably expect to merit and possess the confidence of his electors, should be the only person concerned, who should have no opinion of his own ; that he should be reduced to a *vox et præterea nihil*, a mere echo ? It would surely be ridiculous to expend such sums, and to employ such intrigues, to obtain a seat in the Legislature, for the privilege of being a trumpeter ; the simple channel of the ignorant and contradictory wishes and sentiments of all the illiterate and depraved inhabitants of a popular town, or county ! As this cannot surely be the scope and meaning of representation, let us divest ourselves

selves of every prejudice, whether popular, aristocratic, or monarchical, and candidly consider what is so.

A member sent to the House of Commons, from whatever part of the kingdom, either of England, or Scotland, has a voice in every matter agitated in that House, which relates to any part of the island, however distant from the spot, for which he is returned. Except the local business which affects his immediate constituents, and them only, he is as much the representative of, and ought to be as much concerned for any part of both kingdoms, as for his own county, or borough.

If this be an incontestible truth, it follows of course, that he cannot be the mere partial voice of a small district; but, from the moment he takes his seat,
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he becomes a PUBLIC MAN, accountable to the whole nation, and consequently not the obedient creature of any particular part of it. So forcibly am I impressed with the persuasion, that this is the true constitutional description of a member of parliament, that I cannot think him justifiable in preferring the local interests of his particular borough, to those of the community at large, provided that the community be injured by the pursuit of those interests. Nor should these arguments be confined to this island, since it is now evident to every understanding, that the most dangerous consequences might have ensued from a longer adherence to locality, in opposition to the just demands of Ireland respecting her trade.

Nothing is so unbecoming a great nation, and consequently every part of it; and

and nothing, in general, more fatal to its welfare, than that ungenerous, and contracted spirit, which postpones universal good to partial advantage. This reflection, were it indulged, would carry us far beyond these kingdoms, or even Europe, and consequently lead us from the subject immediately before us.

That this is the language of the constitution, and that the notion which prevails with some, that the delegate is merely the voice, the automaton of his principal, is very defective, may fairly be gathered from the consideration, that the power of removing a member of parliament, for any part of his conduct, does not reside in his constituents, during the legal term for which they have chosen him. Did the laws admit the very faulty idea, that the legislator is also absolutely accountable to a small

a small number of individuals, they would certainly empower them to dismiss him from their service, whenever they should see occasion : they possess no such power, and the dangerous confusion that would result from it, proves its impracticability.

What then is the particular connection, it may be asked, what the relation between the *Elector* and the *Elected* ? I answer, None ; except the acknowledgment due from the latter, for the trust and confidence reposed in him ; the first has done his duty, by exerting the best of his judgment in the choice of a man, every way qualified to serve his country ; and it is the duty of the latter, from that moment, to regard his immediate constituents, in all general concerns, with the same eye, that he does those of any other member in the House.

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If the above doctrine be true, and a member of Parliament be the representative of the whole nation, it should seem of little moment by whom he is appointed. This should render individuals less anxious for a *personal delegate*; and it shews the weakness of that argument, which inculcates the notion, that *slavery* must result from the want of such immediate representation.

A competent number of the most able, upright, and opulent commoners, representing the whole body of that denomination, conversant in public affairs, and cherishing one and the same interest with the whole body they represent, must equally serve all. It becomes consequently indifferent, by whom each individual is sent. Every Englishman of every rank has a claim to his services; and this is

is the most simple and rational manner of understanding that great truth, " that
" every man, in a free country, acts in
" the affairs thereof, either by Himself,
" or his Representative,"

Representation, seen in this light, abolishes all those invidious distinctions, in the constituent body, of qualification, rank, age, profession, or sex; the person, and property of every individual are equally protected; and the whole body of the people form, in the strictest sense, the third estate, by a set of delegates properly qualified to superintend the true constitutional privileges of the whole, and whose interests are one, and the same with every member of the community.

The truth of what has been here said, appears to be tacitly acknowledged by the whole

whole people. It would be rare to find a copy-holder, or even a day-labourer, who would envy in a free-holder his right of voting, unless it be for the corrupt reward he may obtain by it; nor would it be adviseable for the latter to use the absurd language, which some authors would put into his mouth, and to call the first a *slave*. If the honest free-holder has the trouble, or, if you please to call it, the right, of travelling to the farthest part of the county to assist in chusing the knights of the shire; the copy-holder, and every other individual, enjoys exactly the same benefit from the service of those knights, as that superior being, who thus exercises this great, important, divine, and unalienable privilege, which is extolled by some modern writers in such pompous terms,

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As these appear to be unanswerable truths, it is much to be lamented, that they should be unpopular; but as long as they are so, they must be enforced with great tenderness, and the prejudices of the people should be respected. This, it is hoped, may be duly attended to in any new regulations that may be established; but, in the mean time, it may not be amiss to illustrate the above reasoning by an example or two, drawn from experience,

A young gentleman, upon leaving the University, makes the tour of Europe to finish his education: upon his return a vacancy happens in a populous borough; he is recommended to the electors to fill it: Certain conditions are made to prevent an opposition, and, after his election, he complies with those conditions, and makes a present to three hundred pot-boilers of three

three guineas a man. He was, perhaps, not personally known to ten of his constituents, but his guineas rendered him an excellent representative. In what light must this transaction appear to any considerate man, with true constitutional notions of representation; and what opinion must he entertain of the great importance of those rights so pompously described! Thus connected with his electors, this young gentleman could have no reason to expect from them any *instructions*, but those which their example conveyed to him: he might fairly have sold those, whom he had so notoriously bought. This parliament expired, he was chosen for a great and respectable county, without opposition; but at a subsequent election, a meeting of the gentlemen of the same county was convened, to consider, as usual, of proper persons

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to represent them. At this meeting a third candidate was proposed, and after the speech was made in his favour, it was not difficult to observe in the countenances around, that an approaching contest, with all its consequences, would be displeasing to a county, which had, for many years, preserved its peace and harmony.

The gentleman alluded to, who had served the county in the last parliament, seized the opportunity, and, expressing his sense of the honour the county had already done him, he painted, in strong colours, the pernicious effects of a stubborn contest; and concluded, with binding himself, and proposing to the other two candidates to abide implicitly by the opinion of that very full and respectable meeting, where almost every gentleman of weight was present.

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He said, "that he should be the last
" man in England, who would wish to
" dispossess the lower class of the people
" of the smallest of their *privileges*.
" That *that* of voting was of a nature
" not to be exercised but at the will of
" those, who should offer themselves for
" their choice; that they could not force
" gentlemen into their service, nor create
" an opposition in despite of them: So
" far it was evidently in the breasts of
" that Assembly to prevent the danger-
" ous, and, perhaps, ruinous consequences
" of an event, which would, at the least,
" disturb the good neighbourhood and
" cordiality of a county remarkable for
" both, and produce nothing but idleness,
" drunkenness, corruption, and blood-
" shed. Nor," said he, "would these
" calamities (for such the examples of
" other counties have proved them), be
" confined

“ confined to the electors alone, but per-
“ vade every corner, and engage the very
“ lowest of the people in the general con-
“ fusion. In this view of things (and he
“ could never see them in any other) he
“ could not but think himself a truer
“ friend to these very men, by the pro-
“ posal he was about to make, than by
“ giving them an opportunity of exercising
“ rights, which must inevitably be at-
“ tended with so much mischief.”

He concluded this short speech, which obtained a general approbation, with the above proposal, which could not but be accepted by his two competitors. The sense of all the gentlemen present was immediately taken, and a great majority appearing in favour of the old members, all farther opposition to them was very prudently and fortunately prevented. This
the following resolution was agreed to in the
assembly

assembly of gentlemen, whose principles and good sense may fairly be supposed to carry as much weight, as those of the same number and rank in any other part of these kingdoms, approved of this arrangement; and the unanimity of that day must be a sufficient proof that much may be advanced in its favour. Amongst the objections to which it may be liable, the chief that presents itself is, that by the resolution taken at that meeting, the rights of the free-holders were exercised by the gentlemen who composed it, and not by the free-holders themselves.

They who contend for the universal privilege of the people at large to appoint their delegates, may, perhaps, assert that the whole are injured by such proceedings; but it is notorious, that, as our

laws now stand, they have not ALL this privilege, and that the wisdom of almost every age has refused it. Even at this day, the most strenuous advocates for parliamentary reform and the rights of the people, contend against this unbounded right of suffrage; and the friends of it, however high in rank, are very few indeed in number.

In the provinces of North America itself, where the democratic spirit reigns in all the beauty of youth and vigour, this universal right is not allowed; and, by some of their constitutions the qualification of voters is higher, even than in this country. The necessity, therefore, of some line of separation between those who have, and those who have not this right, being avowed, the question will

arise, *where* in prudence and wisdom this line should be drawn.

Nothing can require more judgment, and more intense consideration, than the alteration of an old system, which has been so long in force, and appears to be so strongly established. Since, however, so many corruptions have by length of time crept into it, it is highly requisite that the whole should be new-modelled; and I sincerely join my prayers with those of every moderate man in the kingdom, that such regulations may take place, as will secure to the nation at large the blessings of industry, harmony, liberty, and prosperity.

Without a mutual confidence in all ranks and denominations of men; without the steady pursuit of one general in-

terest, these blessings will never be enjoyed; and it is devoutly to be hoped, that that ill-founded discord, those dangerous struggles between the different limbs of the same trunk may be done away, and that ALL may contribute wisely and amicably to the good of ALL. The great impediments to this desirable state of happiness are those destructive passions, ambition, avarice, lust of power, revenge, intemperance, envy, and pride. Since these passions can not be eradicated, but by a new formation of the human species, it is the part of wisdom to contract, as much as possible, the field in which they operate.

You will perceive, Sir, the point to which this reasoning tends, and that, had I been a leading gentleman at the meeting of the county above mentioned, I should have

have most cordially seconded the motion to abide by the sense of it, without proceeding to a poll. The objection to this has been mentioned above ; and it would have been a grievous offence against the rights of the free-holders, if the direct exercise of them were really of such signal consequence as many suppose.

We will take the liberty to disject the operation of these rights, and discover, by that means, their true national importance,

The first writs that were issued for a parliament, bearing any resemblance to those of this day, were directed to the counties, cities, and populous towns ; that they might send, for the purpose of giving their advice, in certain publick concerns, discreet and intelligent persons from

amongst

amongst themselves, the numbers of whom for each place were fixed by the crown. It was reasonably supposed, that the people in these several places were best acquainted with the capacities and qualities of those who lived amongst them; it would otherwise be pretty evident, by the spirit and import of the writs, that they would have been directed to the individuals themselves. They were to give their advice in certain matters, with which the court and the great counsellors were unacquainted; and if, upon this slight foundation, such a *pile* of representation has been insensibly erected, it must be confessed, that this intention was not manifest when the first stone was laid. However that be, such a system has been established, and our present business is to consider, how far the voters of the county in question, and the service of the nation
were

were really injured by the resolution taken at that meeting.

No man, in the least conversant in election concerns, will entertain the shadow of a doubt that the two candidates, who had a great majority of the gentlemen present in their favour, would have been sure of their election, if the whole county had been polled ; and, consequently, that the unsuccessful candidate acted wisely by declining.

Almost every free-holder in every county, who has not the base intention of selling his vote, will attach himself to, and be guided by, the opinion of some substantial and more intelligent principal. And it is a constant custom, at these elections, for gentlemen of influence and property to ride to the poll at the head of a numerous

a numerous train of voters, notoriously under their guidance. That this constantly *is so*, is indisputable; whether it *ought to be so*, shall be considered presently. These electors could not create candidates in despite of their inclinations, so that, of the three in question, the two who had so many of these gentlemen of property and influence engaged to them, were, upon this principle, certain of success, without the formalities of any farther canvass or poll. It may also be added, that this was done without the smallest injustice or detriment to any of the electors, except those whose sordid and corrupt views merited disappointment; since they must have ultimately been represented by those gentlemen, who had the majority of the meeting, and were, in effect, the representatives of the majority of the under free-holders.

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Let us now consider candidly, how far such influence and power of the principal gentlemen over the inferior electors *ought* to exist.

If the function and duties of parliamentmen are of such infinite consequence to the whole community, is not a most essential TRUST reposed in those who create them; a trust, for the due exercise of which, every elector is accountable to the whole nation, from the King, to the child in the cradle of the peasant? Will any man in his senses pretend, that the knowledge, the experience, the judgment, and the disinterested virtue of the very great majority of those who claim the right of suffrage, are equal to such a trust; and could he wish to see a House of Representatives filled by the spontaneous choice of such electors, without the interference

ference and guidance of men of more knowledge, and consequence? I will be bold to assert, that these electors themselves would, in general, refuse the unassisted exercise of so important a charge; and nothing speaks this language more evidently, than the readiness, with which they universally submit their opinions to those of their more enlightened neighbours. It must always happen, that the gentlemen, who offer themselves to the choice of the people, are perfectly unknown to the multitude; whilst their merits and demerits are not hidden from men of that rank, to whose advice and assistance the inferior voters recur upon these occasions.

If corruption, that infernal bane of all national felicity, merits execration and abolition, and if the right of election must be preserved to that rank of men, whose necessities,

necessities, and whose natural insensibility to the dictates of honour render them most liable to it; can a real friend to his country wish to discountenance that influence, by which alone it can be counteracted, and abolished? Be his wishes what they may, such influence must exist as long as a natural and necessary inequality has place amongst men. The number will be diffident, and will be led: and, even amongst the very lowest classes, there is not a little community without its *Cog du village*. Whoever denies and censures this, must censure nature and the decrees of providence. No set of men can wisely or justly oppose themselves to these palpable decrees; nor ought any *Constitutional Society* to excite the people to a perfectly independent and unadvised use of a franchise, too unwieldly and essential for the contracted experience

xience and capacities of those who claim it.

Should not my words in favour of this natural influence carry sufficient weight, let us examine those of the first authority, of even the Prince of Reformers himself. He speaks, indeed, of the influence of the Peers, but the truth he maintains is equally applicable to that of the powerful Commoners. * “It is true,” says he, “that the Peers have a great influence in the kingdom, and in every part of the public concerns. Whilst they are men of property, it is impossible to prevent it, except by such means as must prevent all property from its natural operation; an event not easily to be compassed, while property is power; nor by any means

* Thoughts on the Cause of the present Discontents, p. 27, fifth edit.

“ means to be wished, while the least notion exists of the method, by which this spirit of liberty acts, and of the means by which it is preserved.” So far this author is clearly of our opinion; but, in the subsequent part of this paragraph, you will observe in what manner he endeavours to explain away the truth that had escaped him, by attributing to the importance of the people the operation and the effects of that influence. He proceeds to say, “ If any particular peers, by their uniform, upright, constitutional conduct, by their public, and their private virtues, have acquired an influence in the country, the people, on whose favour that influence depends, and from whom it arose, will never be duped into an opinion, that such greatness in a peer is the despotism of an aristocracy, when they know and feel it to be the effect and

“ pledge

“pledge of their own importance.” That is, in other words, if the people did not exist with the important rights they possess, such peers could not possess this influence. This we all know; but, if it be true, as this author allows, that nature, property, and virtue, with their necessary effects, must be attended by that influence, as long as they have place in the universe, they become consequently the *primum mobile*, the efficient cause, and not that importance which the author ascribes to the people.

It is by no means intended to dispute this importance, but to contend for the virtuous and salutary use of it; and as it cannot be expected, that the people, unassisted should possess in themselves that uniform, upright, constitutional conduct, those public and private virtues, the author enumerates, it is highly expedient for

for the general good, that their important privileges should be influenced, and guided by those who do.

Would to God ! that this devoted country may never have cause to lament the ruinous effects of a **CONTRARY INFLUENCE**, and the misery that must ever attend its exertion by **MEN OF VERY OPPOSITE QUALITIES** !

After the two universities, the corporations, and principal inhabitants of cities and great towns, who have the right of election in them, and, perhaps, the most respectable bodies of electors who send members to parliament; if the liberty has been taken above to suppose them for an instant as corruptible as their neighbours, it was only for the sake of the argument, and in order to confute the

the mistaken notion, advanced by the friends of an universal right of suffrage, that such a plan would abolish corruption from the difficulty of bribing such numbers.

It appears reasonable to consider these corporations in nearly the same light, with the gentlemen at our county-meeting. They are the representatives of their fellow-citizens, as those were of the inferior free-holders ; and I will therefore refer to the reasoning in support of the resolution of that day, which is equally forcible in the instance before us.

It would be difficult, absurd, and unjust, to attempt to persuade men of their being aggrieved, when their best reason convinces them that they are not so ; and the many examples of great and populous towns,

towns, which wisely reject this boasted right of being immediately represented, speak more forcibly to the understanding, than all the enthusiastic harangues and publications of the lovers of disorder and misrule.

There remains to consider what possible advantages can arise to the nation from the exercise of this right, by the corrupt and depraved inhabitants at large of those abandoned boroughs, which have been so often, and so justly, the object of public as well as private animadversion. They have well deserved the name of the “rotten part of the constitution,” so emphatically pronounced by your illustrious father: they are the vile nurseries of every vice to which human nature is liable; and if patriotism consists in the culture and promotion of these, the greatest of

all calamities must ensue, the total misconception and confusion of truth and error, of right and wrong.

If the privilege of suffrage was, in very early times, confined within much narrower limits, by a regulated qualification in free-holders, exceeding that of this day by ten to one, these arguments must have some weight. But if we take into the account the increase of population, and the still greater increase of the powers, which the representatives of the people are, by some means or other, invested with, it must be folly to revert to antient examples, or to contend for the enlargement of this privilege.

From the evident intent and spirit of the first writs, that were issued for assembling a parliament, the members were literally

literally to be chosen from among the very people to whom these writs were directed ; so that, in strictness, a great part of the seats in that house should, at this day, be occupied, according to these lovers of antiquity, by the respectable pot-boilers of Hindon, Shaftesbury, &c. &c.

The Commons of England are now composed of all ranks of men, from the eldest son of the first duke, to the very lowest voter in one of these boroughs ; and, till the friends of confusion shall have accomplished their wishes, by abolishing every kind of gradation amongst men, and by pounding into one heterogeneous and discordant mass, all rank, property, science, and every virtue, with the contraries of all these ; till, in short, the levelling spirit, which is gone abroad, shall have completely finished its righteous

teous work, these distinctions must remain in some preservation. Amongst these we find that rank of men, from whom are taken representatives of the whole; and nothing is more certain, than that they ought, according to the original system, to be the real electors of the general delegates.

The distinction antiently preserved between the knights, the citizens, and the burgesses, prevails no longer: they have now the same privileges, the same functions, and the same confidence; and, as the field from which they are taken, is very extensive with respect to rank, property, and every consideration, the sentiment is not very aristocratic, which would enforce the expediency of confining the *ultimate* power of choice to this order of men.

If what has been advanced be founded in truth, and that there must naturally prevail a mutual interest in every common wealth; if the welfare of the commonalty be the real care of those who represent it, it should seem, as has been already suggested, of little moment by what means the representative body of the whole is formed; however little it may be intended to deprive the people of their share in its formation.

If peace of mind and happiness are the chief objects of pursuit, that species of government, the best calculated to secure them, should be the best. At the same time it is contended, that the best constitution is that, where almost every individual has a share in the government. Nothing, however, is more certain, than that such a constitution is the least calculated

culated to produce the real blessings resulting from that peace and happiness.

Compare the annals of this FREE country with those of any other, and examine which has been the most liable to that bane of every human felicity, civil discord. The train of thought which flows from this reflection, is extremely paradoxical: it holds out to our view the first of blessings, and shews us, at the same time, how incapable man is of enjoying it, in his present state of imperfection. So generously impressed are some friends to mankind with the desire of maintaining them in every right they inherited from nature, in the infancy of society, that they lose sight of their true interests, in their present state of political manhood. **If**

If we return with the poets to those days of innocence which formed the golden age, it must be allowed that such creatures could not possess too much liberty, or too many privileges. Those times are no more; and if it would be dangerous, and in some respects not quite so decent, to revert, either for rights, or manners, to those regions of idea and fancy, it must exceed the wisdom of man to ascertain the boundary of our retrospect. Nothing therefore is so vague and unsatisfactory, as the recurrence to FIRST PRINCIPLES.

Your correspondent, Sir, is well aware of the slippery ground, to which his philosophy has led him. He professes himself an enthusiastic admirer of the English constitution, but honestly avows his opinion, that its frame is too perfect for hu-

man

man imperfection. That we may live to deserve the blessings it is calculated to produce, is his most fervent, but hopeless prayer. Let us, in the mean time, strive to maintain the purity of that constitution, by rendering ourselves worthy of it. Instead of encouraging those struggles for power, which the different branches of that constitution are too apt to excite; let us labour to strengthen those principles of concord and union, which are the soul of it. It is the part of true wisdom to check those efforts, however they may indicate the strength and vigour of this form of government; and to regulate those exertions, which tend to self-destruction. The strenuous endeavours of our greatest and **BEST** men, must be directed to this salutary end, in all plans of reformation; in which they will never

lose sight of that first, though much mis-
taken object, **GENUINE LIBERTY.**

It is from the sincerity of my heart,
that I declare it as my opinion, that more
firmness of mind, more uprightness of
intention, more sagacity, more patriotism,
and more virtue, never resided in the ex-
ecutive power of this realm, than at this
day; nor in any administration to which
that power has been delegated. If these
blessings are continued to us, we shall
again be a happy people; if, by any fata-
lity, we should, *at this crisis*, be deprived
of them, we are undone.

I speak the language of every good and
intelligent man in the kingdom, when I
take the liberty of conjuring you, Sir,
firmly to maintain the post, to which
your sovereign has so wisely and oppor-
tunely

truly called you. Were I to utter more of the same language upon this subject, even truth would become more offensive to your ears, than that unmanly, ungenerous, and malicious detraction, that *telum imbelle*, at which you smile with compassion, while it drops harmless at your feet,

I have the honour to be,
with sincere attachment
and respect, &c. &c.

P. S. It has been thought most advisable to add the very unfinished sketch of a plan of parliamentary reform, in a detached Appendix, with some comparative arguments upon that, and the present mode of electing the representatives of the

the people. I am perfectly sensible of the many objections to which this plan must be liable; and I fear that the most weighty will be that of its being entirely new. I confess that I have always seen much danger in altering, or touching the parts of the **OLD FABRICK**; nor can I perceive, as I have already said, that any great end can be answered by such partial alterations. It is with the utmost diffidence, that I make an humble offer of the shell of this **NEW EDIFICE**: it is totally in the air; the apartments of it are but slightly touched; they are left for the finishing hand of those who have more taste and intelligence: and, if it should never be useful, it may, at least, amuse as a balloon.

APPENDIX.

A P P E N D I X.

THE chief aim of the foregoing letter, is to offer a very humble opinion concerning the true nature and intention of parliamentary representation ; the abuses it has been subject to, and the improbability of correcting those abuses by the plans of reform, which seem to be intended.

To recapitulate the substance of the letter ; it has been urged, that every senator is a PUBLICK MAN, and not simply the dependent voice of his immediate constituents ;

tuents ;—that the house of representatives would answer every purpose of their institution, by whatever fair and uncorrupted mode they may be appointed to that trust ; that they would equally protect the rights, properties, and persons of the people, and guard their interest, with their own, whether authorised by election, or any other disinterested species of nomination ;—that the privilege of suffrage is less dangerous to publick freedom, when confined to the few and intelligent, than when extended to the ignorant, and the corrupt ;—that nothing is more fallacious than the common notion that the people, even those who have the right of voting, are literally represented by their own supposed immediate choice ; and consequently, that the general extension of that right would induce infinite confusion without the expected advantages.

vantages.—That, granting these *postulata*, the frequency of elections could answer no end, but that of increasing the opportunities of dissipation, debauchery, tumult, and corruption ;—that the present method of competition, and that by which the candidates offer themselves to, and solicit the suffrages of the people, destroy the idea of their free choice, and appointment : they must receive those who offer, and even in cases of competition, their field of election leaves them but little scope, and that of rejection still less.-----But above all, it has been urged, that a reform is more wanted in the *Elected*, than in the mode of their election ; since in them is vested the trust and power of the whole commons. The outline of the plan for the correction of these evils is as follows.

The

The house of representatives may consist of much the same number as at present, of not less than five hundred, nor more than six hundred.

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In order to their election, each county should be divided into districts, with a town of some note in each district.

Every parish in each of these districts (upon a day fixed for the same operation, through the whole county) to appoint one or more deputies, according to the number of its inhabitants; which deputies are to meet, at an appointed time, at the chief town of the district, for the purpose to be hereafter explained.

The manner of chusing these deputies, and the qualification of those who are to elect them in each parish, may easily be settled;

settled ; nor does it appear to be of much consequence, whether that right be general or confined.

These deputies, when chosen, will receive their credentials signed by the minister and parish-officers, and will represent their parish in their chief town.

All the deputies, thus assembled from each parish of the district, will proceed to the election of proper persons to represent the people in parliament, under the direction of the chief magistrate of the said town for the time being, who will act as the returning officer, and return the names of the gentlemen there chosen, to the sheriff of the county.

As the manner of these elections is so nearly connected with the intended regulations

regulations concerning those gentlemen, who are to be the objects of their election, it will be proper to proceed next to that material article.

The *Qualification* of the candidates for parliament, as far as relates to the *quantum* of their property, must be fixed; but it should not be more in land, than the present qualification for knights of the shire; nor less, if so little, as that for burgesses: and, besides those, thus to be qualified, all the sons and brothers of peers, or of opulent commoners, possessing landed property to a certain amount in any part of the kingdom, should be deemed qualified.

No candidate to be offered, but such as has been settled for a certain time within the district, except such brothers, and sons

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of peers, and great families, the chief of which families must also be settled within the district.

As according to this plan, the numbers thus to be appointed, as proper representatives of the people, are not limited; every gentleman, qualified as above, within the district, may send in his pretensions in writing to the returning officer thereof, offering himself as a candidate, without appearing in the town upon the day of election.

The names of all the candidates being thus in the possession of the returning officer, they must be proposed, separately and distinctly, to the deputies of the parishes; and every candidate to be esteemed an object of their choice, who has not the negative of a majority of these deputies.

All

All the gentlemen, thus approved of, are to be returned from the several districts to the sheriff, and to be registered as the body of men, from whom the representatives of that county are to be ultimately appointed.

As, upon this plan, each county will send a certain proportion of members to parliament, the *quota* of each may be chosen by ballot, by the gentlemen themselves who are thus registered.

And, as the friends of annual parliaments may expect, in such a scheme, some attention to their principles, it may not be amiss to change one fifth part (as nearly as can be ascertained) of the house of commons annually, so that nearly one fifth of the representatives of every county may be changed each year. The members thus re-

lieving, as well as those to be relieved, will be likewise chosen by ballot from amongst themselves, by the gentlemen registered as above, provided the whole number be changed during the five years; at the expiration of which term, another general election will take place upon the same plan.

In case of a vacancy by death, or any other cause, that vacancy to be filled by the same method, and an immediate ballot be proceeded upon for that purpose.

As nothing has hitherto been said of the cities and boroughs, it may be proper to add, that those amongst them, which are to retain the right of sending their own delegates, will be so far incorporated with the county to which they belong, as that their members will be regarded as part of that *quota*, which the county

county is authorised to send to parliament. With respect, however, to the boroughs, it may be worth considering of what advantage it may be to them, in general, to retain their immediate right of sending representatives, should such a plan, with all its regulations, be put in practice; --- obliged to elect from their own districts, and in the fair method established in the counties, they would not find *their account* in preserving their franchise, and might prudently acquiesce in the mode settled for the other parishes.

The boroughs, usually esteemed private property, would, upon the same principle, lose their value: a due compensation might be made to the proprietors of them.

The present right of election in the two
Universities,

Universities, in London and Westminster,
to remain unaltered.

With respect to the other cities, and great trading towns, such regulations may be proposed, upon this liberal, and incorruptible plan, as would be perfectly satisfactory. Very useful members of parliament may be sent from amongst themselves; and, upon that account, the qualification in landed property, might, in some instances, be commuted.

This introduces the consideration, that the *commercial interest* may seem to be disregarded in this sketch. The projector, perfectly unconscious of any partial or contracted sentiments, cannot admit the idea of any competition, or opposition between the *landed* and *commercial* interest. They depend upon each other, and, for their

their mutual advantage, they assist each other. It must be observed too, that numbers of the mercantile subjects of this kingdom have realized their property, and unite in their persons both these interests : there can, therefore, be no danger in this country, that the commercial can be neglected.

As very bad consequences have resulted from the little attention that has been paid to the essential article of *qualification*, it is to be hoped that care will be taken to prevent a possibility of evasion, under any plan of reform that may be adopted.

That which is now humbly proposed, being evidently founded upon the most pure and liberal principles, the exclusion of every species of *undue* and *corrupt influence* appears to be effectuated ; and a fair *jurisdictio*.

fair representation of the people to be established upon the safest, and most constitutional foundation.

In return, it appears highly expedient that a certain number of the officers of the crown should have seats in the house of commons, *in right of their offices*: such as the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Secretary at War, the Attorney and Solicitor-General, the Vice-Chamberlain, the Treasurer, and Comptroller of the Household, (if they are not peers) and such others as may be named.

To maintain in their due equilibrium the weight and power of each of the three estates, and to protect from insult and injury the known constitutional prerogatives, and privileges of all of them, is the part of every honest, and intelligent Englishman.

glishman. Whatever daring, unprincipled attempts * may have been made to
obstruct

* Such attempts, at such a crisis, will be an inde-
lible disgrace to the annals of this country, and will
cast equal ignominy upon the characters of their
authors, and upon those of their servile abettors.
Such attacks upon the constitution ; such unprovoked
insults upon *the best of princes*, are mere sport to
minds, which have dared, in the face of Heaven,
and their injured country, to coalesce in infamy. To
assist and support such leaders may also be the play of
those, who, without religion, without virtue, and
without property, are, from morn to morn, vo-
mited forth in broad day-light, from the foul jaws
of those detestable nurseries of deceit and immora-
lity, to guard, as senators, the rights, properties,
and liberties of a great nation. To such these at-
tempts may be sport and profit ; but that gentle-
men of rank and fortune, to whom that nation
looks for protection and salvation, should submit to
be the dupes, the tools, the objects of the derision
of such characters, passes comprehension. Such in-
stances

obstruct the operation of the executive branch in its undoubted rights, that of dissolving

stances of weakness, of ductility, and of the prevalence of bad examples, whilst they prove the danger of great talents without morals, evince the necessity of a speedy and radical reform in the House of Representatives. For this we must look up to that able, upright, and truly disinterested Young Man, whose talents and virtues alone render him the object of the malice and hatred of those, who, in these qualities, are conscious of their inferiority. Hence that unmanly, that illiberal detraction from those virtues; and hence those malicious attempts to distress and impede the public business, to which a set of gentlemen, professing moderation, impartiality, independence, and patriotism, are so infatuated as to lend their assistance. The most unpardonable offence of the Minister is, that he is the Minister, and must continue to be so, as long as he merits the protection of his Sovereign and his country. The only crime that can be laid to his charge, is his extreme youth, and, heinous as it may be, nothing

dissolving parliaments is one of the most indubitable, and most expedient, which the wisdom of the laws has vested in the crown; as much for the general welfare, as its own security.

The exercise of this part of the royal prerogative would be greatly facilitated by

such nothing is more certain than that both his enemies, and his pretended friends, are daily contributing towards its correction. That fostering *hot-bed* of dung and dirt, which they are kindly heaping upon him, will ripen his youth into mature age more speedily, and effectually, than time or ordinary experience. — Let it not be supposed, that these sentiments flow from an inordinate attachment to *prerogative*: The foregoing plan, which confines the influence of the crown to the hearts of its subjects, must defend the author from such an imputation. He knows and feels the virtues and the patriotism of the present *father of his people*; but he feels also the necessity of guarding against those, who may hereafter evince a contrary disposition.

such a plan as is here sketched; and that, with no other inconvenience, or loss of time, than the meeting of the *registered men* in every county, to ballot a-fresh for the *whole number* of their representatives.

But should not the dissolution be at such a season as to require great expedition; and should it be the desire of the crown to appeal again to the people at large, the election of registered men might be proceeded on; the temper of the times might occasion a change in the returns, from the several districts, to the sheriffs of the counties; and gentlemen might offer themselves, who had before been disinclined to the service.

Were it possible to reconcile the minds of men to so much novelty, and were it not in human nature to prefer the *ills* it knows,

knows, to *advantages* it has not experienced; it must be confessed, that a plan of this kind might merit the attention, and improvement of abler heads. It seems to promise an adequate representation of the people, free from any unconstitutional influence, or corruption; and, if the qualifications of the candidates are strictly attended to, it promises also to purge the House of Commons of its most dangerous evils.

F I N I S.



E R R A T A

Page 14, Line 7, for members, read numbers.
23, last line, dele also.
47, l. 14, for and, read are.
52, l. 4, read the before representatives.

H I N I H

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